

Week 2 – Downfall of a Dreamer – Genesis 37:1-36

Scripture Reading: 1Peter 5:6-11

Introduction

Last week, we spent our time looking back at Joseph's family history and what we saw wasn't pretty

Joseph came from a line of deceivers and manipulators and he was born into a family that was marked by generational favoritism and unhealthy competition

And as Joseph's young eyes witnessed all that transpired around him his character was being formed

Character

These days, the concept of "character" has kind of fallen out of favor and been replaced by a culture of "personality"

And "achievement" has largely been replaced by "performance" as we've become more concerned with what people think of us than what we truly are

"Character" is an interesting word that comes from a Greek word meaning, "an engraved mark" or "a symbol or imprint on a thing" and in ancient times a character was the marking that was impressed or scratched into clay or wax

When used in that way it was the clear marking that distinguished a thing and kept it from being confused with other, similar things

And you can imagine how the character of a skilled artisan would be coveted because it denoted an item of quality

Then in the 17th century, the word came to be associated with the qualities or *characteristics* that define and shape a person

Things like thoughts, beliefs, habits, actions, motives, principles, morals, and so on...

Now, when we say someone *is* a character we are talking more about outward appearances but character in its truest sense speaks of who everyone is deep down at their core

And character is typically formed at a very young age – and it is often indelibly formed, making character an almost permanent part of a person from an early age

So, as I pointed out last week, we need to be very careful with the example we set before our young people because they are always watching us and our actions often speak louder than our words

If you followed my advice last week, you read through Genesis 37 at least once and maybe a few times this week

So you have already seen a great example of how character reveals itself as the attitudes and actions of Joseph's older brothers tell us just what kind of men they were

We will be dealing with them a lot this morning but first we're going to try to get a handle on some details in the account that can cause us to potentially come to some wrong conclusions

If you're taking notes, Roman numeral one is some **important understandings**

Next we will look at those things that led to the brothers' mistreatment of Joseph or the brothers' **motivations**

Then we will look at the **results** that came from the brothers' actions

As we begin, I want to say that some of you had some really good questions for me this week and how much I appreciate you asking those questions because they show that you are listening and then thinking about what you heard

So keep the questions coming – just don't be surprised or upset if I tell you that I will answer them in a future sermon because sometimes your curiosity is forward-looking

I think this morning's sermon should answer the questions that came my way last week but, if not, ask me again

I. Some Important Understandings

The account of Joseph is not unfamiliar to us and most of us have heard a sermon or two about it or participated in a study of the account at some point

Joseph is a common character in children's classes that some of us can probably remember seeing his life enacted on the Flannelgraph [Flannelgraph.jpg]

But there are some details in this chapter that we need to understand so that we don't come away with wrong ideas

And the first detail we need to address is **the coat** that Jacob gave to Joseph

A. Joseph's Coat

Look with me at **Genesis 37:1-4**

Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

These are the generations of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

We want to focus on that last sentence in **verse 3** – *And he made him a robe of many colors.*

Most people tend to picture Joseph's coat kind of like a brightly colored patchwork quilt like this: [dreamcoat.jpg]

Or perhaps as a coat of many various colored stipes like this: [stripedcoat.jpg]

That's the kind of coat I remember seeing printed in my Sunday school papers as a kid [sundayschool.jpg]

That whole idea comes from a rather unfortunate translation of the Hebrew word *passim* because the proper meaning of *passim* is uncertain – it actually has three possible meanings

And the whole idea of it being a coat of many colors comes from the Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament

But these days many scholars of the Hebrew language say that *passim* means "flat of the hand or foot" and would describe a long garment that extended to the ankles and the wrists

And that's the way some English translations have translated the word both here and in its only other Old Testament usage which is found in **2Samuel 13:18-19** [show reference]

There the text is speaking about the standard garment worn by a princess

In any event, what is obvious is that the coat had significance and that it showed that Joseph was different from his older brothers and **what the coat meant is far more important than what it looked like**

And I believe the best explanation is that the coat designated Joseph as Jacob's chosen heir and that he was superior to his brothers

Jacob was a shepherd so his sons would have been hard workers who toiled out in the fields tending the sheep

And for that kind of work, the normal dress was a knee-length; sleeveless tunic that allowed for freedom of movement and someone who wore an ankle-length, long-sleeved garment didn't do manual labor – they were the boss

That fact also serves to explain what we read in **verse 2** about Joseph bringing a bad report of them to Jacob

In all likelihood, Joseph wasn't being a little tattle-tale but was actually fulfilling his responsibility by reporting what was going on out in the fields out of his father's sight

Then, even though Joseph is mentioned very few times in the New Testament, we do see support there for the idea of him being elevated over his brothers

Keep your finger in Genesis and turn with me to John 4 where we find the account of Jesus and the woman at the well
Notice what it says in **John 4:5** - *So he [Jesus] came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.*

Now turn back to Genesis 33 where we see the only report we have of Jacob owning land – he was normally a nomadic herdsman but in **Genesis 33:19** we see that he bought this particular piece of ground near Shechem

It seems likely that giving Joseph the only piece of ground he ever owned is another indication that Jacob had named Joseph as his heir

And, although we've criticized Jacob for showing favoritism, he had every right to do so because Reuben, his first-born, had forfeited his rights by sleeping with his father's concubine, Bilhah as we saw last week in **Genesis 35:22**

Still, no one likes to be passed over and that long, perhaps colorful, robe had to be a constant source of irritation to the older brothers every time they saw Joseph

B. Joseph's Dreams

Next we see that Joseph is a dreamer – and as we progress through our study we are going to see dreams play a very prominent role in the life of Joseph

Let's look at verses 5-11 [**Genesis 37:5-11**] where we see two dreams that Joseph had

Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

The dreams Joseph related are not exactly subtle and their meaning is not hard to discern

In Joseph's dream life he saw himself being the object of his family's veneration

It's easy to read this account and think that Joseph was being a self-absorbed punk

But that seems to be a rather harsh and, really, unfounded allegation to make

After all, while he does seem to be a bit breathless in relating the dreams, just notice how many times he says "behold" to be sure he has the full attention of his brothers, he may well have just been unwise or tactless in sharing the dreams

It seems that the dreams were from God – they certainly proved to be prophetic after all – so it would be a stretch, as well as a stain on his otherwise spotless character, to say that Joseph was definitely being a braggart

What is important and very interesting is the reaction of those who heard the dreams

People dream weird stuff all the time – and most of the time their dreams are only interesting to them – because no one else is typically impacted by the imagery within the dream to the degree that the dreamer is

And who really pays a whole lot of attention when a kid has dreams of grandeur?

But, clearly, Joseph's family took his dreams seriously

Jacob appears to have taken Joseph's dreams seriously enough to rebuke him for having dreamed them and to question their content and seriously enough to file them away in his memory

Perhaps Jacob was remembering his dream at Bethel of the ladder reaching from the earth to heaven and the angels ascending and descending on it and recognized that just maybe Joseph's dreams were also from God

And his brothers took them seriously enough to hate him for the content of his dreams as well as for talking about them

And as the account progresses we next see nine grown men conspiring to kill their little brother who was just a seventeen year old youth

Picking up the story again in verse 12 we see that the older brothers had taken their father's flock near Shechem

Remember that Shechem was the city where Dinah was raped leading the brothers to take their deceitful, murderous revenge on all the men of that place

So it seems unwise at best for them to be pasturing the sheep where they would surely be hated and in danger

And perhaps that fact occurred to Jacob after he had not heard any news from them for a while so one day he decided to send Joseph to check on them and report back to him

But when Joseph got to Shechem he found his brothers had moved on about another day's journey to Dothan

Now Joseph could have turned back and told his father that his brothers had moved on from the danger zone but he continued on to find them at Dothan

Dothan lies on a plain where one can see a long way and the brothers who were there with the sheep saw Joseph coming from afar – they may well have recognized his coat – and they began to conspire to kill him

II. The Brothers' Motivations

And in their words and actions we discover their reasons or motivations for wanting to kill Joseph

Look with me at verse 19-20 [**Genesis 37:19-20**]-

They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."

They referred to Joseph as "this dreamer" showing very clearly just how much those dreams of his bothered them

This shows again just how seriously they took those dreams

I believe they understood that Joseph's dreams were from God and therefore prophetic – and they didn't like it one bit

A. Jealousy

In reality, the brothers were jealous of Joseph - that fact is plainly stated in **verse 11**

1. Root

We don't often consider jealousy to be a really big deal or number it among the really bad sins

In fact, our consumer culture thrives on jealousy and the desire to one-up the other guy

Jealousy is an emotion that begins as a small **root** but if one isn't careful it can soon grow out of control

The author of Hebrews warns in **Hebrews 12:15** against allowing a "root of bitterness" to take hold in our lives because it will spring up and cause trouble defiling many - and the Hebrew idiom "root of bitterness" means to be envious

Webster's 1913 Dictionary defines envy as: *Chagrin, mortification, discontent, or uneasiness at the sight of another's excellence or good fortune, accompanied with some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages*

That's a pretty good definition but when you get right down to it, envy is "resistance to God's judgments"

Because, if we believe that God is sovereign and that nothing happens outside of his divine will, then when we envy another person we are in fact saying that God got it wrong

Pastor Donald Grey Barnhouse [**barnhouse.jpg**] is quoted as having said,

"How unfortunate that many are not willing to take the place which God has assigned them in this world! When a man is covetous and envious, he is saying, 'God, I am not satisfied; you didn't give me what I want!' Such a man would dethrone God, and re-deal the events and possessions of life so that little *he* would be exalted."

That seems to be an accurate picture of Joseph's brothers

Joseph's brothers were jealous over their father's love that was lavished on Joseph

They were also jealous of his position over them – no doubt Reuben had forfeited his claim to superiority but there were still nine other brothers older than Joseph who had been passed over

And they were jealous that God might just also favor Joseph as his dreams showed that they might one day be made to bow before him

2. Shoot

And jealousy, when it is allowed to remain, further establishes itself as eventually a **shoot** of hatred pushes its way out of the root

We see **three times** in Chapter 37 alone that Joseph's brothers hated him –

Verse 4 – *But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, **they hated him** and could not speak peacefully to him.*

Verse 5 – *Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers **they hated him even more.***

Verse 8 – *His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So **they hated him even more** for his dreams and for his words.*

In time, Joseph's brothers allowed their jealousy to grow to the point they couldn't stand even the sight or sound of him

3. Fruit

Then, as we know, all plants produce **fruit** when they reach maturity

And when the brothers saw Joseph coming toward them across the plain the fruit of their jealousy and hatred was revealed as they conspired to murder him and throw his body into a pit

In one fell swoop they could take care of all of Joseph's privilege that tormented them and brought them so much pain

Their root of jealousy had grown into a shoot of hatred that brought about the fruit of eliminating their brother from their lives

Not by murder – but for all they knew it was just as permanent as they never expected to see Joseph again

B. Light and Dark

There was also another motivation that we need to be aware of because, like jealousy, it's still around today

And that is **the natural enmity between darkness and light**

Joseph wasn't at all like his brothers

They were rough men who we have seen engage in deceitfulness, murder, and incest and Joseph's good character only served to emphasize just how rotten they were

Jesus taught in **John 3:19-20** – *...people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*

And that still holds true today

That's one reason why many seem desperate to eliminate all vestiges of Christianity from the public square

When Christians live as true followers of Jesus Christ they expose the emptiness and evil of everything else

We are living in a time that is as close as I can imagine to the time of the Judges when everyone did whatever they liked

Only now, we are expected not just to tolerate everyone else's choices but to also celebrate them and even join in with them

And when we show forth the light, darkness shrieks and tries to do whatever it must to eliminate it

No one who is doing evil wants to be reminded of what is right and no one wants to have their sins illuminated

And anyone who does so, even if only by their existence, will be hated – and that was the case with Joseph

III. The Results of Their Actions

So, the brothers planned to lay hold of Joseph to kill him and throw his body into one of the nearby pits and likely would have done so had the oldest son, Reuben, not spoken up and suggested just throwing him into the pit alive

We are told that Reuben's plan was to go back later to rescue Joseph and return him unharmed to their father but he never got the chance because while he was away the other brothers sold Joseph into slavery

And even though that distressed Reuben, it appears they all conspired to dip his special coat into the blood of a slaughtered goat and take it back to their father to give the impression that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal

It was a cold, calculated plan that might seem unbelievable were it not for the fact that we have just seen them cast Joseph into the pit and then sit down nearby for a bite of lunch

And they did just as they planned as we see in **verse 32** – **I want you to be sure to notice the depth of their hatred for Joseph in that they didn't refer to him by his name or even as "our brother" but only as "your son"**

They carried out their plan but they didn't foresee what the results their actions would be

A. Jacob's Grief

First, we see that **Jacob was inconsolable in his grief**

We are reminded here of David's grief over Absalom as Jacob tore his garments and put on sackcloth in a classic display of profound grief

Our text tells us that he mourned for many days and that no one could console him

The brothers didn't take into account – or didn't care – just how hurtful their actions would prove to be to their father

B. Brothers' Guilt

Joseph was all alone as part of a caravan to Egypt when the brother's presented the bloody robe to Jacob and he likely was also in deep distress not knowing what the future held for him

But I can't even imagine the guilt that must have weighed on the brothers who had put him there

We aren't told in our passage anything about Joseph's response to being cast into the pit and then sold as a slave by his own brothers

But we know what happened in between verses 24-25 because it's revealed later in Genesis 42:21 - why don't you turn there as we look at it?

In this part of the account, Joseph is the second in command in Egypt and the brothers have no idea that it is Joseph who is talking with them through an interpreter

And talking amongst themselves in a side conversation that wasn't interpreted, they reveal that they believe their present fate is a reckoning for what they did to Joseph 22 years previously

Listen to what they said **Genesis 42:21** - *Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us."*

For 22 years Joseph's anguished cries for them to relent had echoed in their ears and the image of Joseph's distressed countenance as he was led away in bondage was etched on their eyes

They were hard men when they sat down to eat while Joseph called out from the bottom of the pit but they never got over it – they sure didn't foresee their own guilt

C. God's Guidance

They also thought they could derail God's plans

They couldn't bear the thought of Joseph being favored and they thought they had put an end to it once and for all

But what they didn't know was that their actions actually furthered God's plan

God wanted Joseph in Egypt to have him in place for his purposes and the brothers sent him on his way

Conclusion

As our passage ends we see Joseph being sold once more to a man named Potiphar who was the captain of Pharaoh's guard

This part of the story is without a doubt terrible

I can't even begin to understand the depth of despair and the feelings of betrayal that must have been afflicting Joseph as his brothers stripped him of his coat and threw him mercilessly into a pit only to pull him back out and sell him

The events of life often conspire to make us feel the same way as people disappoint and even betray us

Jealousy creeps in and begins to take root and grow into feelings we'd rather not have and we may even despair over our predicaments

But as we heard in our Scripture reading this morning from 1Peter we can be assured that God knows and God cares

Peter wrote that we can cast all our anxieties on God because he cares for us

And we can be secure in knowing that there is nothing too large for our mighty God to handle and nothing too small for our loving God to be concerned about

But we can also rest assured that no matter how grim things appear, God means for us to prosper

And while we don't always see the end of a matter, God sees the light at the end of whatever darkness he takes us through

As he was making the long walk to Egypt Joseph could not have foreseen just how things were going to play out but he knew who his God was and who he was and he remained faithful to both

Like I told you last week, we are going to skip over Chapter 38 which deals with Joseph's brother, Judah, the fourth son born to Leah

So next week we will be looking at Chapter 39 as the account of Joseph resumes with him serving in Potiphar's house

Once again, I recommend you read through the chapter a few times this week in preparation for Sunday and read Chapter 38 too if you have time because the portrait it contains serves as a great contrast to Joseph's character

Let's pray